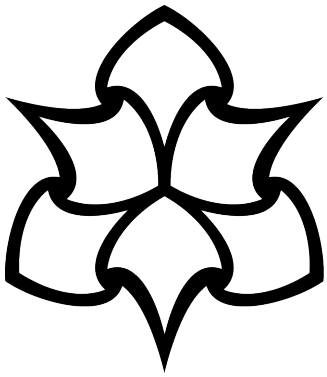

English rural shopkeepers as retailers and consumers of colonial goods, c.1660-1760

Introduction

Colonial goods lie at the heart of our understanding of both consumer and retail revolutions. Their importance to contemporaries is apparent from the burgeoning number of advertisements placed in newspapers; the imposition of high excise duties; the myriad attempts to manufacture copies or alternatives, and from the diatribe of political commentators such as Daniel Defoe who famously railed against the insidious spread of Indian calicos.[1] They were worth promoting, taxing, copying and complaining about because they were things that people wanted, and which transformed their behaviour and homes.

For historians, they are central to arguments about new forms of consumption and consumer behaviour. As novelties they could create a whole new set of demands as well as a proliferation of related material objects that facilitated their consumption (from tea cups to snuff boxes) or reflected their myriad uses (chintz curtains and muslin petticoats). Variations in quality and type could drive emulative consumption and form a central part of identity construction, both through social practices and material culture.[2] Analyses of their spread through English homes has emphasised social, geographical and topographical differences, with wealthier and urban households being more innovative in their adoption of a new domestic material culture much of which was linked to colonial groceries, Indian textiles and the wider world view with which they were associated.[3] Consumption amongst lower social groups may have developed more slowly, but tea and cotton goods, as well as sugar, tobacco and spices, were widespread by the middle decades of the eighteenth century.[4]

This widening market has encouraged a view that the sale of colonial groceries in particular helped to transform retailing by underpinning the provision of other goods and making shops viable in places where demand had previously been insufficient. As Shammas puts it: 'once shopkeepers stocked tobacco, sugar and caffeine drinks that

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[1] STOBART, J., *Sugar and spice: grocers and groceries in provincial England, 1659-1830,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 165-89; ELLIS, M., COULTON, R. and MAUGER, M., *Empire of Tea. The Asian Leaf that Conquered the World*, London: Reaktion Books, 2015, 161-78; RIELLO, G., "The globalization of cotton textiles. Indian cottons, Europe and the Atlantic world, 1600-1850", G. RIELLO and P. PARTHASARATHI (dir.), *The spinning world. A global history of cotton textiles, 1200-1850*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 261-87; BERG, M., *Luxury and Pleasure in eighteenth century Britain*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 85-110; DEFOE, D., *A Review of the state of the British nation*, London, 1708.

[2] See, for example, MCKENDRICK, N., "The consumer revolution of eighteenth-century England", MCKENDRICK, N., BREWER, J. and J.H. PLUMB, J.H. (dir.), *The birth of a consumer society*, London, Hutchinson, 1982, p. 9-33; SMITH, W., *Consumption and the making of respectability, 1600-1800*, London: Routledge, 2003; ELLIS, COULTON and MAUGER, *Empire of Tea, op. cit.*; LEMIRE, B., *Fashion's Favorite*. *cotton trade and the consumer in Britain, 1660-1800,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.

[3] WEATHERILL, L., *Consumer behaviour and material culture* (second edition), London: Routledge, 1996; OVERTON, M., DEAN, D., WHITTLE, J. AND HANN, A., *Production and consumption in English households, 1600-1750*, London: Routledge, 2004; BICKHAM, T., "Eating the empire: intersections of food, cookery and imperialism in eighteenth-century Britain", *Past and Present*, 198, 2008, p. 71-109; EACOTT, J., *Selling empire: India in the making of Britain and America*, *1600-1850*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

[4] KING, P., "Pauper inventories and the material life of the poor in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries", HITCHCOCK, T., KING, P. and SHARPE, P. (dir.), *Chronicling poverty: the voices and strategies of the English poor 1640-1840*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1997, p. 72–98

were bought frequently but in small amounts, it made sense to stock other provisions purchased in the same way, such as salt, soap, starch, candles, butter, cheese, flour and bacon'.[5] Recent research has revealed a rather more variegated and nuanced picture than this allows, Stobart demonstrating how imported groceries were often introduced and sold alongside a range of other goods, rather than vice versa.[6] Nonetheless, the powerful stimulus provided by a whole range of new and increasingly affordable goods undoubtedly boosted the retail trade and encouraged new selling practices, including newspaper advertising, fixed prices and the branding of goods, most notably in the eighteenth century tea and chocolate.[7]

It would be going too far to suggest that colonial goods alone were responsible for all the changes that occurred in consumption and retail practices, but they clearly played an important role in both arenas. What I want to do in this paper is to bring together elements of these two transformations by analysing the sale and ownership of colonial goods by English village shopkeepers in century following the Restoration – a crucial period in both retail and consumer history. In particular, I want to explore how village shopkeepers might have used colonial goods in making their homes and shops more sociable spaces. This idea of the home as showcase has been touched on in the urban context, where Cox and Stobart have argued that some shopkeepers entertained and sold to privileged customers in private rooms, away from the bustle of the shop.[8] Was it also true of village shops and, if so, what role was played by colonial goods?

To answer these questions, I draw on a set of 95 probate inventories for rural households in four English counties: Cheshire, Northamptonshire, Kent and Cornwall. Rural in this context is taken to comprise all non-urban settlements, from substantial villages with complex occupational structures, to much smaller places amounting to little more than a handful of farms and rural craftsmen. Population totals could vary from several hundred in places such as Newington in Kent and Tregony in Cornwall, down to barely 150, as in Wynbunbury in Cheshire. The data set includes 55 inventories for rural shopkeepers who sold colonial goods; the remainder comprise other rural households, mostly craftsmen, professionals and other retailers rather than farmers, and operates as a control group. By their very nature, probate inventories form a snapshot of the goods in the shop when the retailer died. Unless death was sudden, it is likely that stock levels were run down as the shopkeeper grew old or became ill, so they probably give us a conservative picture of the goods available. Nonetheless, they are well established as a source for analysing retail stock, which is generally listed under a separate heading and often itemised in detail. Groceries were normally excluded from domestic inventories; their presence is thus a clear indication of retailing activity, but it means that the ownership and use of groceries within the home can only be identified via the presence of related goods: tea pots, tobacco boxes, sugar dishes and the like.[9]

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[5] SHAMMAS, C., *The pre-industrial consumer in England and America,* Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 259.

[6] STOBART, *Sugar and Spice*, *op. cit*., 41-55.

[7] ELLIS, COULTON and MAUGER, *Empire of Tea, op. cit.;* MUI, H.-C. and MUI, L., *Shops and shopkeeping*, *in eighteenth-century England*, London, Routledge, 1989, p. 221-48; STOBART, *Sugar and Spice, op. cit.*, p. 176-83.

[8] COX, N., *The complete tradesman: a study of retailing, 1550-1820*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000, p. 135-9; STOBART, J., "Accommodating the shop: the commercial use of domestic space in English provincial towns, c.1660-1740", *Citta & Storia*, 2, 2007, p. 351-64.

[9] COX, J. and COX, N., "Probate inventories 1500-1800: a system in transition", ARKELL, T., EVANS, N. and GOOSE, N. (dir.), *When Death Do Us Part,* Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. For analysis of this type, see WEATHERILL, *Consumer behavior*, op. cit.; OVERTON, DEAN, WHITTLE and HANN, *Production and consumption*.

Selling colonial goods

Village shops have long been the poor relation in studies of retail development. Attention has centred on the bright lights of the city, with rural shopkeepers either assumed to be running small and unsophisticated general stores serving the basic needs of the local community or exploiting their neighbours through monopolistic supply.[10] However, there is growing awareness of the dynamism of village shops and the wide range of goods offered to local consumers, from the gentry to agricultural labourers.[11] The sample of shops studied here confirms that colonial goods formed an important part of this stock, although the appearance and trajectory of key items varied considerably (Table 1).

Caffeine drinks appeared only in the 1720s, but were available from one-third of rural shops in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. Some shopkeepers, such as George Hodges (1740) even offered a choice of bohea and green teas, whilst Mary Rich (1731) and Thomas Wright (1756) also sold chocolate.[12] The quantities were quite small, but then even middling-sort consumers often bought tea by the half-ounce.[13] Stocks of Indian calicos and muslins moved in the opposite direction, largely as a result of the partial (1701) and later total ban (1721) on the sale and use of such items.[14] Calicos were found in a small number of village shops in the late seventeenth century and were joined and then superseded by muslins, which were listed amongst the stock of more than half the shops in the sample during the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Lengths greater than 20 yards were carried by John Clarke (1710), Catherine Gubbs (1720), Stephen Lawrence (1721) and Richard Reade (1723).[15] Unsurprisingly, both muslins and calicos disappeared from the shelves of village shops in the mid 1720s, shortly after the ban came fully into force.

Both of these commodities were important, but the mainstay colonial goods sold in village shops were sugar, spices and tobacco, each of which appeared in at least three-quarters of inventories in the study period as a whole. The quantities could be impressive: William Bastard (1720) had 4 casks of sugar (each weighing between 112 and 224 lbs), a further 178 lbs in loaf sugar, and a total of 2675 lbs of tobacco, but many others had several hogsheads of sugar and hundreds of pounds in weight of tobacco.[16] This suggests high and sustained rural demand for commodities which were, of course, well-established parts of consumer culture by the late seventeenth century. Sugar was consumed by all but the very poorest as well as the elite – the obvious market for the

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[10] For an overview of this stereotype, see BAILEY, L. "The village shop and rural life in nineteenth-century England: cultural representations and lived experience", Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Northampton, 2015, chapter 2.

[11] MUI AND MUI, *Shops and shopkeeping, op. cit.*, p. 154-9, 209-12; BAILEY, "Squire, shopkeeper and staple food: the reciprocal relationship between the country house and the village shop in the late Georgian period", *History of Retailing and Consumption,* 1, 2015, p. 8-27; NORTH, S., "Galloon, incle and points: fashionable dress and accessories in rural England, 1552-1665", JONES, R., and DYER, C. (dir.) *Farmers, Consumers, Innovators: the World of Joan Thirsk*, Hatfield, University of Hertfordshire Press, 2016, p. 104-23; STOBART, J., "The village shop 1660-1760: innovation and tradition" JONES, R., and DYER, C. (dir.) *Farmers, Consumers, Innovators: the World of Joan Thirsk*, Hatfield, University of Hertfordshire Press, 2016, p. 89-102.

[12] Kent Archive Services (KAS), 11.80.134, Mary Rich (1731); Northamptonshire Record Office (NRO), Thomas Wright (1756); KAS, 11.77.190, Richard Johnson (1725).

[13] STOBART, *Sugar and Spice, op. cit.*, p. 205.

[14] RIELLO, "Globalization of cotton textiles', op. art., p. 273-4. See also LEMIRE, *Fashion's Favorite, op. cit.*.

[15] KAS, 11.70.224, John Clarke (1710); Cornwall Record Office (CRO), 1505, Catherine Gubbs (1720); CRO, Stephen Lawrence (1721); KAS, 11.75.115, Richard Reade (1723).

[16] CRO, 1508, William Bastard (1720).

double-refined sugar sold by John Read (1692) and Stephen Lawrence (1721).[17] Much the same was true of tobacco, sometimes supplied by landowners to their workforce as a form of non-monetary payment, but also taken in more refined form, including snuff, which appeared in a small number of village shops in the 1740s and 1750s. Spices were also widely stocked, usually in quantities measured in ounces rather than pounds, but often in a variety which indicates that some village shops could supply the culinary demands of rural households. Ralph Edge (1683), for example, sold Jamaica pepper, long pepper, white pepper, mace, coriander, nutmegs, cloves and cinnamon.[18]

Colonial goods were thus available to rural households via shops in their own villages as well as those in town. However, the penetration of such exotic items into village shops was highly varied: William Rumfield (1694) had at least 18 different types of colonial goods in his shop whilst his contemporary, Thomas Sackett (1689) stocked only sugar and dried fruit.[19] How easy it was to access colonial goods and the degree of choice between different types and qualities of commodity thus depended on where you lived and how far you were willing to travel. There was a regional pattern to provision, with Kent village shops notably better stocked than those in Cornwall – a pattern that reflects wider differences in domestic material culture in the two counties and the presence in Kent of several substantial villages, some of which had formerly enjoyed urban status, including Smarden and Elham.[20]

Larger and well-connected villages such as these were generally better served, both in terms of the number of shops selling colonial goods and the range of goods available.[21] Indeed, whilst we should be cautious of over-interpreting individual examples, it is possible to identify something of a hierarchy of shops that equates to the nature of the settlement in which they were located (Table 2). Ralph Ampson of Wybunbury (1697) was probably typical of shopkeepers in smaller villages. He could offer his customers four different sugars (which varied in price and their culinary uses), the most commonly used spices, and tobacco, as well as dried fruit, hops, soap and even brandy. Ralph Edge (1683) kept shop in Tarporley – a bigger village and a stop on the coaching route to London. He had a larger and more varied stock of colonial goods including a choice of different tobaccos and a greater range of spices, plus indigo and logwood. His inventory also lists 600 tobacco pipes and several pieces of calico, although it is dominated by a huge variety of hardware, haberdashery and textiles: anything from buckles to lace to paragons. This Aladdin's cave reflected many of the archetypes of the village shop as general store, selling a little of everything; however, choice was at its widest in urban shops such as that of Alexander Chorley. In addition to tea and coffee, he had ten different types of sugar – even distinguishing between Liverpool and Bristol loaf sugar – as well as considerable choice of tobacco, spices, spirits, dried fruit and oils.

These hierarchical distinctions were important in shaping access to colonial goods, but difference provision was also linked the nature of the retail business being operated by the individual shopkeeper. For some, keeping shop was clearly a form of secondary employment – a position reflected in their stock of colonial goods. John Questead of Milton in Kent (1704) had a well-equipped shop from which he sold a small range of groceries, of which sugar was the only colonial product. With a combined value of £5 10s. his fittings and stock were clearly far less important to his livelihood than his boat

[17] Cheshire Archives and Local Studies (CALS), PC 51/22 Overseers' Accounts: St John's, Chester; KAS, 11.56.159, Richard Reade (1692); CRO, Stephen Lawrence (1721).
[18] CALS, WS 1683, Ralph Edge.
[19] KAS, 11.53.192, Thomas Sackett (1689).
[20] OVERTON, DEAN, WHITTLE AND HANN, *Production and consumption*, p. 91-114.
[21] For fuller analysis, see STOBART, J., "Making the global local? Overseas goods in English rural shops, c.1600-1760", *Business History*, forthcoming.

and tackle, worth £35 6s.[22] Here, the marginality of both shop and colonial goods is very clear, but even where large quantities of sugar, tobacco and spices were listed, they might still form a small part of the larger business. This was the case for Stephen Lawrence of Tregony in Cornwall. His inventory lists pepper, nutmeg, cloves, five types of sugar, treacle, rice and tobacco with a combined value of about £21 10s., but this represented just 6 per cent of his total stock-in-trade which was dominated by a range of hardware and European textiles. Moreover, the extent to which this was sold from his shop is uncertain; he owned a quarter share in a ship's cargo and was probably engaged in coastal trading as well as retailing.

In contrast with this marginality, colonial goods were central to the prosperity of other rural shops. The inventory of William Rumfield (1694) itemises a large range of groceries worth a total of about £172 – nearly two-thirds of his stock by value.[23] Amongst this were significant quantities of colonial groceries, including: tobacco, £16 13 4d of which was stored in his cellar; four types of sugar, plus treacle, worth a total of nearly £4; seven different spices valued at £4 5s. 7d., and an unspecified quantity of muslins, valued along with some hollands at £6. Together, these goods formed nearly 16 per cent by value of his stock and over one-quarter of his groceries, despite the presence of large quantities of tallow, candles, hops and soap. Much the same is true of John Clarke (1710), although cloth formed a far larger proportion of his stock. He had printed and white calico as well as muslin (together worth £8 17s. 10d.), £10 9s. of tobacco and three types of sugar valued at £2 16s. 8d., as well as four different spices, indigo and nutmeg graters. A generation later, Thomas Wright (1756) was even more dependent upon colonial goods which together formed nearly one-quarter of his stock which was almost entirely comprised of groceries. Innovation was seen in his stock of tea, coffee and chocolate, but this was worth just £1 15s. 6d. – less than half the value of his tobacco and a fifth of what his sugar was worth. It is likely that the turnover of these caffeine drinks would have been higher, meaning that it probably formed a larger proportion of his profits, but it is clear that long-established mainstays of the grocery trade remained important.

These three shopkeepers confirm that colonial goods could form a significant element of their stock, but never dominated. That householders were not visiting village shops solely to obtain these things is apparent from the typical basket of goods bought by the customers of William Wood in the 1780s.[24] This contained tea, sugar and treacle, but also soap, candles, flour, meal, bread and cheese. Nonetheless, colonial goods provided new business opportunities for rural shopkeepers who, in turn, formed an important part of the retail system bringing these things to rural consumers.

Owning and using colonial goods

Stephen Lawrence, the Cornish retailer that we met earlier, both stocked a range of sugar, tobacco and spices, and participated in the growing culture of caffeine drinks, even if they failed to appear on the shelves of his shop. He had 5 lbs of chocolate in his kitchen, which was apparently for his own use rather than being retail stock, and there were tea tables and china in his best chamber and his parlour.[25] The analysis of Overton et al shows that Lawrence was unusual in this regard, with only 6 per cent of Cornish

[22] KAS, 11.65.113, John Questead (1704).
[23] KAS, 11.58.121, William Rumfield (1694).
[24] STOBART, *Sugar and Spice, op. cit.*, 202.
[25] Listing domestic groceries in inventories is unusual – see COX and COX, "Probate inventories", op. art..

inventories including utensils for hot drinks in the period 1720-49; but to what extent did he reflect wider practices amongst rural shopkeepers?[26]

The inventories do not allow for any meaningful analysis of the use of calicoes and chintzes because, in sharp contrast with shop goods, the fabric used for hangings and bedding was rarely specified. However, they do provide us with a clear picture of the extent to which village shopkeepers were able to make and consume hot drinks and, to a lesser extent, store and use sugar, tobacco and spices (see Table 3). In the late seventeenth century, ownership of such items was limited to the very occasional appearance of tobacco or sugar boxes, chinaware and silver teaspoons. Little changed in the first decade of the eighteenth century, but from about 1720 there was a growing number of rural shopkeepers owning chinaware, tea kettles, coffee pots and teaspoons, as well as pepper boxes and sugar casters, each of which were found in the homes of at least one in ten shopkeepers selling colonial goods. This broad trend continued into the second quarter of the eighteenth century, although ownership was focussed much more on utensils for hot drinks. More than one-quarter of shopkeepers owned a tea-kettle, over one-fifth had chinaware or teaspoons and one in seven had coffee and tea pots and tea tables.

Two things are significant here. The first is that this growth was centred on utensils for hot drinks and went beyond simply owning a few silver teaspoons – a growing trend that Horrell, Humphries and Sneath have noted from the Old Bailey depositions and which might be interpreted as a means of storing wealth as much as facilitating the consumption of tea.[27] Indeed, it seems likely that they would have been deployed largely as items of display, adding a dash of luxury when serving tea to guests.[28] More striking in many ways is the appearance of tea tables which, even if it is merely a change in nomenclature, speaks of tea as something special in the shopkeeper's home. Of course, spices, tobacco and sugar could be stored in a wide array of different receptacles, some of which could be repurposed from earlier uses whilst others were not sufficiently striking or valuable to be separately itemised in the inventories. Their absence from the inventories does not mean that these things were absent from the houses of shopkeepers. Yet what stands out is the ownership of kettles, pots, cups and saucers, and tables for serving coffee and above all tea; these were activities that were increasingly open to and perhaps more important to rural shopkeepers – a point to which we will return later.

The second thing of note is that levels of ownership were much higher amongst shopkeepers who sold colonial goods than in the wider rural population (see Table 3). Even in an area with high levels of ownership, such as Kent, only one-quarter of households owned utensils for hot drinks in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. My sample suggests a figure of about 36 per cent for this group of shopkeepers. The difference was even more marked when comparisons are made with the control group from the same counties, although here the gap had closed by the second quarter of the eighteenth century. This suggests that shopkeepers selling colonial goods were also innovative consumers of colonial groceries, being willing and able to acquire the equipment necessary to prepare and consume hot caffeine drinks earlier than their neighbours.

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[26] OVERTON, DEAN, WHITTLE AND HANN, *Production and Consumption, op. cit.*, p. 99. See also WEATHERILL, *Consumer Behaviour, op. cit.*, p. 61-3

[27] HORRELLS, S., HUMPHRIES, J. and SNEATH, K., "Consumption conundrums unravelled", *Economic History Review*, 68, 2015, p. 830-57.

[28] For discussion of women deploying table linen in this way, see VICKERY, A., *The gentleman's daughter: women's lives in Georgian England*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996, p. 207-08.

There are, however, several important caveats to put against this association between the sale and consumption of colonial goods. The most obvious is that the numbers involved are small, meaning that we should treat any findings with some caution. That said, the patterns are clear and the trends broadly in line with those found in larger scale studies, such as those by Weatherill and Overton et al. The second is that, whilst ownership of material objects for storing, preparing and serving colonial groceries was widespread amongst these shopkeepers, it was significantly lower than that seen for urban tradesmen. Direct comparisons are difficult, but a bigger sample, comprising a large proportion of such households, shows levels of ownership around two times higher across many utensils for hot drinks.[29] It is significant, however, that the difference is one of degree rather than type, suggesting that rural shopkeepers shared a common culture of consumption with their urban counterparts. This questions the rural-urban divide identified by Estabrook and Pennell, perhaps indicating that this was more to do with occupational differences than location per se; certainly Weatherill identifies husbandmen and yeomen as particularly slow to take up new forms of consumption.[30]

A third caveat is that the extent to which these new forms of consumption penetrated the homes of rural shopkeepers was highly variable and often quite limited. The vast majority of shopkeepers owned nothing to indicate that they were consuming colonial groceries and, whilst this proportion fell over the course of the study period, it still ran at about 50 per cent in the 1740s and 1750s. In part, this reflects the lack of detail provided in many inventories and the low value of basic equipment such as tea cups and kettles. Amongst those who did own such items, the range of possessions increased considerably over the years (from an average of 1.3 items in 1670-99 to 3.6 in 1725-60), suggesting that there was a growing willingness or ability to embrace what were increasingly widespread consumption practices. Stephen Lawrence thus emerges as a man broadly in step with his times, yet exceptional in the range and quantity of equipment for serving hot drinks that he had accumulated before his death in 1721. Less unusual was the mismatch between evidence of selling and consuming tea and coffee that he encapsulated; indeed, only half of the retailers dealing in caffeine drinks owned anything to suggest that they drank tea or coffee in their own homes.

This takes us to the thorny issue of understanding how rural shopkeepers consumed colonial goods in their homes and how this related to their retail activities. Some important pointers can be gained from the diary of Thomas Turner, who kept shop in the Sussex village of East Hoathly in the middle decades of the eighteenth century.[31] In March 1758, he entertained the steward of the Duke of Newcastle, to whom he periodically supplied goods. They drank tea and played cards before Turner provided what was, by his usual modest standards, an elaborate meal of 'salt fish, a dish of Scotch collops with force meat balls, a piece of cold roast beef, some potted beef, a cold baked rice pudding, bullace and gooseberry tarts, celery, watercresses, egg sauce, cold ham and parsnips'.[32] Such a meal would have required a variety of spices as well as sugar, but it was the tea consumed earlier in the evening that formed the usual lubricant to his social and commercial interaction. For example, in July 1764, he noted that 'Mrs Fuller, widow, buying some things in the shop in the morn, breakfasted with me, as did Miss Fanny in the afternoon, and drank tea with me'.[33] These were presented as entirely routine

[29] STOBART, *Sugar and Spice, op. cit.*, p. 244.
[30] ESTABROOK, C., *Urbane and rustic England: cultural ties and social spheres in the provinces, 1660-1780*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998, p. 128-63; PENNELL, S., 'Material culture of food in early-modern England, c.1650-c.1750', unpublished D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1997, chapter 4; WEATHERILL, *Consumer behaviour, op. cit.*, 172-3.
[31] VAISEY, D., *The Diary of Thomas Turner, 1754-1765*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984.
[32] *Ibid*., 14 March 1758
[33] *Ibid*., 11 July 1764

activities, part of neighbourliness as much as an attempt to ingratiate himself with customers or enhance sales; but visits mostly involved buying as well as drinking. The previous winter, he noted in his diary that 'Fanny Hicks, James Marchant, Fanny Weller and Bett. Mepham drank tea with me, and they stayed and spent the evening with me and played at brag. They all met by accident, coming to buy goods in the shop, Fanny Weller excepted'.[34]

It is unclear exactly where this tea drinking took place within Turner's shop and home – indeed, it is probably a mistake to assume a firm distinction between the two in his case. However, it must have involved a kettle, tea pot, cups and saucers, and a table of some sort. Many of the shopkeepers studied here could have entertained in a similar way, with the equipment for tea drinking slotting in alongside other everyday goods. John Day of St Columb Major in Cornwall (1727) had just one living room, his hall containing a mix of old and new, with pewter ware and brass pots listed alongside a copper coffee pot, two tea kettles, a tea pot, tea cups and assorted tea ware.[35] This was a comfortable enough place for socialising, but some shopkeepers could offer a more formal environment for entertaining friends and customers – categories which often overlapped, as Turner's tea drinking makes clear. In urban shops, it was the parlour which was most often equipped for such purposes, being fashionably and comfortably furnished with window curtains, mirrors, pictures and books, and much the same was true of rural shops.[36] Two examples will suffice to illustrate the point. Elizabeth Wells (1743) was a widow living in Bridge in Kent, where she sold a small range of groceries, possibly the remnants of a larger retail business. Her parlour was furnished with a looking glass, 12 pictures and a small sconce; window curtains and two screens; a set of six cane chairs, two tables and a smaller tea table, and two tea pots, nine china cups and a variety of earthenware.[37] This would have provided a much better setting for socialising than the hall, with its range of ironware, dressers and cupboards. Roger Heald of Poynton in Cheshire (1719) had four separate living rooms, including a Best Parlour as well as a Little Parlour. The latter was used essentially as a bedroom, but the former was an impressive space furnished with a writing desk, 12 leather chairs, an oval table and a tea table; two sconces, a large looking glass and ten pictures, plus a map of London, and a buffet containing drinking glasses.[38] Here, he could serve his friends and customers tea of coffee, perhaps using some of his eight silver tea spoons or three silver sugar casters.

Such spaces and practices were not exclusive to those selling colonial goods: other shopkeepers might also want to entertain in comfortable surroundings. Yet Wells and Heald, exemplify a different quality of setting to that seen in even the best equipped amongst the control group. Joseph Dove (1746), a Newington blacksmith, possessed a large array of equipment for making and serving tea and coffee (nine different items in total), but his parlour feels rather functional: a japanned corner cupboard and six chairs; a round and oval table, plus his tea table; a glass decanter, a plate and an 'old pewter tea pot'.[39] The last of these is significant as it shows that Dove had either been drinking tea for a long while or had inherited an old tea pot – either way, it signals that, by the 1740s, tea drinking was nothing new in rural Kent.

Conclusions

[34] *Ibid*., 14 January 1763
[35] CRO, Stephen Lawrence (1721); CRO, John Day (1727)
[36] STOBART, 'Accommodating the shop', op. art..
[37] KAS, 11.82.116 Elizabeth Wells (1743).
[38] CALS, WS 1719, Roger Heal.
[39] KAS, 11.82.207 Joseph Dove (1746).

The penetration of colonial goods into English rural society was aided by their widespread availability in village shops. This was already well established by the late seventeenth and consolidated through the first half of the eighteenth century. However, the range and quantity of colonial goods found amongst the stock of rural shopkeepers was highly variable: whilst those in larger villages tended to be better stocked, much depended on the nature of the individual retail business. Even where stocks were extensive, colonial goods were never the mainstay. They may have encouraged regular visits to the shop, as Shammas argues, but they were bought along with other, less exotic items, as the account books of William Wood make clear. What is less certain is how the sale of colonial goods and their consumption by rural shopkeepers were related to each other. The evidence presented here shows a correlation between selling and consuming: those who had these things in their shops were more likely to own equipment for storing, preparing or serving them in their homes. This makes a great deal of sense, shopkeepers benefitting from knowledge of and access to these commodities and how they were consumed. However, the relationship was not always evident on the level of the individual; nor is it clear whether consumption was domestic or commercial in its focus. Tea was an important lubricant to the socio-economic relationships that Thomas Turner nurtured with his neighbours and customers, but evidence that rural shopkeepers engaged in treating and soft-selling to their customers is elusive. Like their urban counterparts, some had rooms that could have been used for this purpose and it is significant that these were people who also sold colonial groceries. Given the fluid boundaries between commercial and domestic space within shopkeepers' homes, it is likely that such activities were part of the retail strategies of rural as well as urban shopkeepers, reinforcing arguments that they were part of an integrated retail system with common practices and cultures.

Table 1. Colonial goods stocked by village shopkeepers by commodity type, c.1670-1760

	1670-99		1700-1724		1725-60		Total	
	n=21	%	n=20	%	n=14	%	n=55	%
spices	14	67	15	75	9	64	38	69
sugar	19	90	16	80	11	79	46	84
tobacco	12	57	15	75	14	100	41	75
caffeine	0	0	3	15	5	36	8	15
calicos	3	14	11	55	0	0	14	25
other	6	29	5	25	6	43	17	31

Source: probate inventories

Table 2. Groceries stocked by specialist and non-specialist retailers

	Ralph Edge of Tarporley, ironmonger (1683)	Alexander Chorley of Manchester, grocer (1723)
-	-	coffee, bohea tea
loaf sugar, brown sugar, candy, molasses	coarse brown sugar, molasses	Jamaica sugar, fine powder sugar, fine bastard sugar, coarse bastard sugar, loaf sugar, Bristol loaf, Liverpool loaf, white candy, brown candy, molasses
tobacco	brown tobacco, cut tobacco, coarse tobacco, roll tobacco	best cut tobacco, second sort tobacco, stripped tobacco, roll tobacco, tobacco dust
pepper, ginger, cloves, mace, wormseed	Jamaica pepper, long pepper, white pepper, aniseed, fenugreek, mace, coriander, nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon	nutmeg, cloves, mace, cinnamon, clove pepper, black pepper, long pepper, liquorice, ground ginger, white ginger, raw ginger, saffron, senna, bay berries, galls, diapente, wormseed, aloes, aniseed, caraway, fennel, fenugreek, rice
currants, raisins	prunes, raisins	currants, raisins, malligoes, figs, prunes
brandy	-	brandy, cherry brandy, cinnamon water, aniseed water, caraway water, wormwood water, clove water, rum
hops	hops	capers, anchovies, hops
	starch, soap, alum, logwood, indigo	sulphur, vitriol, saltpetre, alum, stone blue, starch, logwood, brimstone, copperas, vitriol
soap, gunpowder	turpentine, linseed oil, vinegar, rosin, pitch, candles	turpentine, linseed, lamb black, Seville oil, rape oil, vinegar oil, wax, rosin, glue, gunpowder, soap, wash balls, paper

Sources: CALS, WS 1697, Ralph Ampson; CALS, WS 1683, Ralph Edge; LRO, WCW 1723, Alexander Chorley.

Table 3. Ownership of equipment for storing and serving colonial groceries in English rural households, c.1670-1760 (percentages)

		1670-1699		1700-1724		1725-1760	
		Sellers of colonial goods (n=21)	Other house-holds (n=8)	Sellers of colonial goods (n=22)	Other house-holds (n=20)	Sellers of colonial goods (n=14)	Other house-holds (n=12)
Hot drinks	Coffee pot			9.1	5.0	14.3	16.7
	Coffee mill			4.5			16.7
	Tea pot				5.0	14.3	8.3
	Tea kettle			13.6		28.6	16.7
	Chinaware	4.7		13.6	5.0	21.4	25.0
	Tea table			13.6	5.0	14.3	16.7
	Teaspoons	4.7		18.1	5.0	21.4	16.7
Sugar	Box	4.7			10.0		
	Caster	4.7		9.1	5.0		
Spices	Pepper box			13.6	5.0	7.1	
Tobacco	Tobacco box	4.7		4.5		7.1	

Source: probate inventories